

INTEGRATING MOOCS IN THE CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION MODELS

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Abstract. The objective of this paper is to analyze the latest trend in education that has the potential to disrupt and revolutionize the conventional education model, namely massive open online courses. The focus is to find out how this innovative concept can be approached and applied in the context of the Russian higher education. The viable model adaptable for the Russian reality implies integration of open online education into the traditional educational system in the form of blended education. Adopting such model of education may result in the long-term increase of competitiveness among Russian graduates.

Keywords: disruptive; massive open online courses; blended education; Russian higher education; competitiveness.

Introduction

The past two decades have seen rapid advances in present-day reality due to ever increasing penetration of the Internet and technological progress. The Digital Age has firmly established itself at the dawn of the twenty-first century. New technologies that improve our efficiency in every sphere of life, education being no exception, emerge with an astounding regularity. Ground-breaking trends in education digitalization are developing at a sweeping pace. Such rapid and overwhelming developments naturally provoke multiple concerns and uncertainties pertaining to the future of the current state-of-the-art in education [1-4].

This article seeks to address the most prominent recent trends related to emergence of MOOCS or massive open online courses, and blended education as a way of improving the quality of education in Russia. The benefits these trends entail and their long-term impacts have been the main points of consideration in this work.

Integrating MOOCs into conventional model of education

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in ways of integrating open online educational models into the conventional classroom experience. Traditional online courses have been around for more than a decade now. They have been introduced as a sound alternative to the offline education, carrying credit and charging tuition fees. MOOCs, on the other

hand, differ in a way that they provide free content to anyone who is interested; therefore enrollment is often reflected in significant numbers.

Ever since introduced to the Internet community, MOOCs have been under intense scrutiny. As with any innovative concepts, there have been both supporters, among whom MOOCs have become ever more popular, and opponents who have expressed their concerns as to their disruptive nature. There are good reasons for both sentiments that will be addressed in this article in the context of Russian higher education. Comparisons to the Western approach to the implementation of MOOCs will be drawn and suggestions as to efficient integration of online education into the conventional education model will be made.

Moving away from one-fits-all approach

The content of the educational study programs has long been standardized leaving minimal space for variety. Now with the availability of overwhelming number of courses offered at no cost by some of the best educators, everyone has the opportunity to personalize their study plan. Content tailored to the specific needs of a particular student contributes to increasing efficiency in the learning process, leaving space for more hands-on, case-based, and problem solving approach in the classroom.

One does not have to rush through the material in order to keep up with more advanced classmates, being exposed to insurmountable amount of stress and having to leapfrog through significant chunks of crucial information. Therefore, adjustable pace of learning is another aspect that increases students' level of satisfaction when it comes to covering large amount of information.

The role of the teacher

One obvious concern that is related to the new model in question is the role of the teacher. Will it become obsolete? Will most of the teachers lose their jobs except for a few indisputable leaders in the field? We believe that this won't happen, at least not in the foreseeable future. On the contrary, the role of the teacher will evolve. There will not be a need for orators that spend hours in front of the audience, giving lectures on a certain topic. Instead, they will turn into coaches and guides. They will have to become practitioners who are focused on providing practical or applied knowledge rather than staying in the role of theory- and general knowledge holders.

In this respect it is worth mentioning another trend, namely a flipped classroom. This concept ensures a better allocation of time resources, while at the same time preserves the position of a teacher.

Many educators have already integrated Internet content into their lectures and classroom activities. Streaming films, video clips and other Internet content in class to enhance and illustrate lectured material has long been a part of a modern classroom experience. However, the time that a class spends on watching the material that can be covered at home may serve a better purpose. Now the teacher may help with material revision and assist with completing reinforced tasks while supervising the progress. In this sense classroom will become a workshop or a “lab” to build practical skills and enhance understanding of ways of theory application in the real life.

In this model, students cover theoretical material at home, participating in a MOOC. In the classroom, they work on tasks that are more efficiently performed under supervision. Therefore, the conventional model is applied in a new way. Now the teacher can focus on helping students understand practical aspects of the theoretical base in class, without spending too much time on imparting the theory - something that students can cover individually as an assignment at home.

Impacts of online education on the remote areas

In the remote regions people are often more reserved and cautious with respect to innovations, especially those of them that may entail job insecurity. This is certainly a concern that deserves attention. However, we believe the quality of off-line education may significantly improve due to proper and efficient utilization of online models.

On the one hand, offering online courses may help to accomplish a drastic increase in the level of reach among potential students, attracting students not only from more remote areas, but from other countries as well. For the Russian universities it opens up a better access to the neighboring countries at the same time providing greater opportunities for cooperation on many related educational programs and projects; that in return creates a win-win situation where all parties increase the competitiveness of their students. When considering financial aspect, it is also a more cost-efficient way to market the offerings of the university based on the count of money per person with an unprecedented customer reach.

On the other hand, an undeniable benefit schools may enjoy is the access to “superstar” lecturers. It may bring not only educational benefits, but also, just as important, financial gains. Many universities simply cannot afford inviting such educators to give lectures personally, missing the chance to learn from the best. Open online courses may become a great opportunity not only for students but also for teachers to gain valuable insight into the methods used by educators from around the world. Saved budget funds may now be allocated to projects further improving school’s competitiveness, such as exchange programs, internships and the like.

Educators will be able to focus more on the supervising and assisting function, rather than a time-consuming knowledge-imparting one. It is all the more relevant in countries like Russia, where professionals enter the business world with a very theoretical knowledge, often lacking practical know-how. Thus it is not surprising that Russian graduates find it difficult to compete with foreign professionals on the global scale. They usually expect to learn on the job, while in the Western countries obtaining a degree equals a quality seal for a graduate. They are not expected to be retaught at work. After a brief introduction to the process specifics, they are expected to jump right to the task and apply the knowledge that has been obtained over multiple years in a higher education school. In Russia, on the other hand, after five years in universities a majority of graduates expect to receive practical knowledge in the field.

The new model seeks to organize educational process in a way that maximizes the benefits of using classroom as a practice lab. Now students may gain access to the high quality material selected and included in the study program by the teacher, while working on practical skills in the classroom and obtaining hands-on experience. The teacher in his role of a guide and supervisor receives more time to work on a more individualized level with students, who benefit from having more attention specifically granted to each of them in order to address potential gaps in material understanding and open new facets of the theory and its real-life application.

Blended on-line and off-line education

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has suffered a long-lasting state of depression. Most of the spheres of life in the country have faced destructive consequences of the chaotic 90s. Unfortunately, the crisis did not spare educational system as well.

In the following two decades the competitiveness of Russian education has been steadily going downhill. There has been a myriad of challenges the country has had on its shoulders entering the Digital Age. Not only did it have to solve its internal issues and catch up with Western systems, but suddenly it had to face a new, fast-paced reality where the shift to the digitalization of education has become an inevitable prerequisite for success in the current globalized world.

Due to the large baggage of existing challenges, it has always been a temptation to leapfrog some of them and skyrocket straight into the club of the top players on the education arena. Such aspirations have often ended in the adopting of the latest developments in education, without considering the specific nature of the national state-of-the-art in education. The ambition to overtake Western education standards has often backfired resulting in the lack of competitiveness among young Russian graduates who now have to

prove their knowledge in order to operate on the international market. Sadly, the outcome for them is in many cases negative. The experience they have does not correspond to that of the foreign specialists. The implementation of many recent concepts has been out of tune with the international standards and the pace at which these standards are developed, revised and adapted to the needs of the rapidly developing world.

Now the Russian educational system is facing yet another challenge, that is adapting and implementing the latest and most revolutionizing concept in global education that massive open online education has become and its integration into the conventional model. Despite the fact that not a single educational system with an ambition to stay or become competitive in the twenty-first century can afford to ignore this trend, for Russia it overlays the existing complicated nature of national educational system. Therefore, it should become an utmost priority for the country to adapt this new, innovative model to its complex reality and specifics.

The focus should not lie on attempting to eliminate off-line model entirely following the trend for online education. There are two main reasons for that. First of all, students in the Western countries have a more ubiquitous Internet access, thus the technological backwardness in Russian province may jeopardize the ambition to innovate educational system. But what is more important, Western students have a different level of responsibility and determination when it comes to autonomous learning. Russian students, on the contrary, often lack self-discipline and require supervision. Therefore, a blended model of education has the potential to solve aforementioned challenges.

Conclusion

The present work was designed to analyze the latest trend in education, namely massive open online education, the optimal ways of integrating the new education model into the conventional system, and the impacts of these innovative developments.

The most obvious finding that has emerged is that there is a revolution in education underway. A new innovative model offering free open online courses from some of the best educators worldwide is a trend that must not be ignored. The ability to adapt and implement this new model is a prerequisite for a successful and competitive educational system of the twenty-first century.

Education is inevitably moving away from a “one-fits-all” approach toward a more individualized and tailored model. Adapting to this change requires careful consideration of a myriad of factors involved, including country and subject specifics.

The teacher in this new model embraces a role of a guide and supervisor instead of an orator. This new, more specific role is manifested best in the flipped-classroom concept. In this concept, home assignments mainly serve the function of providing theoretical background covered by students individually at a suitable pace on the basis of MOOCs and other open online educational content selected by the teacher. On the other hand, classroom becomes a lab for practical skills training and providing hands-on experience. Therefore, students enjoy a more focused attention from the teacher directly addressed to the existing gaps of knowledge and understanding.

In the remote areas, the impacts involve lower costs of marketing university's services and increase in the level of reach among potential students both locally and internationally.

Apart from that, even remote schools obtain an opportunity to become more competitive by gaining access to the best minds in education and utilizing their knowledge and expertise, while saving budget for other prominent needs, such as student exchange programs, professional training and research.

This work has covered only a small number of issues related to one of the most topical and intriguing new trends in education that certainly deserves further investigation. More discoveries lie in the future, nevertheless it is already clear that open online education has become a part of a new reality of education in the Digital Age.

Literature

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